



## Author-Publisher Tells of Unexplained Transformation

by Michael Tynn

In his book, *A Dog's View of Love, Life, and Death*, Jon Beecher, who uses the pen name J. R. Archer, writes that an "existential vacuum" – a feeling of emptiness, meaningless, and hopelessness – pervades several characters in his intriguing story. At some point in the pursuit of comfort, pleasure, and luxury, they lose sight of the "larger life" and become immersed in the mundane and slaves to materialism. They lose their instincts, intuitiveness and spiritual awareness. However, their canine friends, not being consumed with such materialistic pursuits, have been able to retain these qualities and are able to influence them in spiritual ways.

This "larger life" is a subject that has captivated Beecher, a 61-year-old resident of Guildford, England, since he had what might be called a near-death experience (NDE) some 18 years ago. It wasn't one of those NDEs in which the experiencer floats above his body and watches people attempt to revive him, or tells of meeting deceased relatives and seeing every moment of his life flash before him. If he did have those experiences, he doesn't remember them. In fact, Beecher was given no indication that he was near death. "I fell over while I was sleepwalking and landed on my face," he recalls the accident. "I was unconscious. I almost knocked my front teeth out, my lip was severed and required 30 stitches, and my jaw was broken on both sides and had to be wired up for six weeks. You could just say that I went to bed and woke up on the floor on the other side of the room."

While Beecher has none of the usual NDE recollections, he has experienced something that many other NDEs have reported – a complete change in his outlook on life. "It wasn't so much that I became interested in spirituality as one might become interested in a hobby," he explains. "Before the accident I was an atheist and a materialist. I had no belief or interest in anything to do with life after

death, the paranormal, or religion. During the next couple of years I felt very different about life. I can't say prior to the accident I had a fear of death; like most people of that age I never really thought about it in depth. But now I had no fear of death; I'll go further; I embraced it, not in any morbid way but because now I understood, or at least, came to believe that death is nothing more than a transition from one state to another. I also felt somehow connected, as if I had been plugged into a greater reality. I've had plenty of time to think about it and even now I can't explain adequately how I felt then and how I feel now."



Beecher

At the time of the accident, Beecher was CEO of a London-based independent record company. "Within a year or so of the accident, the music business, which had been my life, now felt trivial and unimportant, as did all the Porsches, big houses, expensive clothes, and all the other material stuff I had deemed important and accumulated over the years," he muses. "It was actually quite depressing at the time because I hadn't joined the dots and understood that the way I was feeling was connected to the head trauma. At one point I even thought I was having a breakdown."

Upon leaving the music business, Beecher founded White Crow Books, which to date has published 178 books, all having spirituality as a central theme. Most of the books have been republications of old books that Beecher thought should be brought back to life and made available to people today, but 48 of them, including *A Dog's View*, are fresh from the writers' fingers.

Beecher began noticing the changes in his outlook within a few weeks of the accident. He could not remember dreaming before the accident, but now he was dreaming most nights and remembering them. "I liked the dreams," he says. "They were a novelty for me and I wrote them all down. Because I was journaling, I noticed after a while that some

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## The Readiness Is All

Benjamin Franklin famously said, "Nothing is certain in life except death and taxes." It is disputed, however, whether death is real.

The important question is, what do we mean by death? The end of the body's life, or the end of individual consciousness?

"If it be now, 'tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come—the readiness is all," Hamlet says. There is no avoiding death, so you would think its meaning would be constantly discussed. But the subject is nearly taboo, and I believe our lives are shallower and less satisfying as a result. Mankind is overwhelmingly unready. Why this avoidance? I'll try to give a few reasons, and thoughts to counter them.

Primarily we avoid considering death because of fear. In the Western world in medieval times, people feared death because they fretted about going to Hell. Nowadays we're afraid that when our ticket is punched we are headed for nonexistence.

Logically this is irrational. The Stoics of ancient days said, where I am death is not; where death is, I am not. Therefore why fear death? More recently, Alan Watts scoffed at the idea that nonexistence could be some kind of experience, like being buried.

But we are all irrationally fearful at times, and few things make us more anxious than passing out of this life. Trying to keep death at a safe distance makes us prone to several common avoidance tactics.

The first is what I think of as the park bench syndrome. It includes all variants of a bench with your name on a memorial plaque. As long as it remains, one person out of a hundred will read it and wonder who you were. Doing good works is admirable, but it doesn't buy you immortality.

Now wait a minute! You're *spiritual*. Ego gratification means nothing to you. Aiding suffering humanity, rescuing cats and dogs, giving up your life (more or less willingly) for your country is its own reward. Again, a satisfaction for you while you're alive, but if you disappear at death your satisfaction disappears as well.

If death is extinction, so is the good you imagine living after you. One way or another all life on earth will eventually end in fire, ice, or hip-hop. The sun will wink out leaving only a fathomless abysm.

The Rev. Samuel McComb brings up another objection. In his *The Future Life in the Light of Modern Inquiry* (1919), he says: "More recently, poetic thought has sought to find a substitute for personal continuance after death in a mystic absorption in the totality of being, or God. ... Now, wherein consists man's real greatness?

Is it not in the fact that he is the creator of character, a unique self-conscious centre of feeling and will? This is the inner core of man's essence. It is this that differentiates him from the brute creation and constitutes him a person. For man so conceived to disappear or be lost 'in the greatness of God' would mean a tragedy, obscuring in gloom the divine character and the spiritual



worth of man."

One more avoidance tactic is seductive because it contains an honest component. This involves some form of agnosticism about life after death.

An example: years ago I found myself in conversation with a Jewish rabbi and asked him what was his, or Judaism's, take on personal survival of death. His answer — I'm paraphrasing — was, "We care about understanding and following the laws of God. The mystery of the individual's destiny after dying is not important compared to living righteously here and now."

These are serious and emotionally rich words. Yet, are the rabbi's stated alternatives mutually exclusive? And for most people, isn't living right more difficult in the absence of any conviction, or at least the struggle to know, about an afterlife?

The Rev. McComb says, "Immortality is either a fact or it is a falsehood. Do you say: Granted, but I am in no position to prove it to be one or other, therefore I can make no affirmation either by way of belief or disbelief. Very well, but you are living as if one or other were true. ... Only the elect few, however, are likely to live as if they were immortal, if all the time they suspect themselves to be only mortal."

## President's Message: Defining Spirituality

Since I was elected the new president of ASCSI, a friend asked me if it would be a good idea for me to define what I mean by spirituality. I agreed and wrote to him, "I define spirituality as our innate and inherent subconscious awareness of the simultaneous and continuous connection of all discrete points in our three-dimensional space with all other such points which defines the wholeness of the universe, thus keeping us connected to all things in the universe as well as the universe as a whole, all the time in real time." In other words, I believe that we, as individuals, are subconsciously and constantly in contact with the universe as a whole and in its parts. This contact is the source of our intuition, paranormal phenomena and many other phenomena and events that cannot normally be explained by science.



This worldview may seem a bit odd for me as a diehard physicist, but I am also a trained historian which gives me a much broader view of science, how new ideas intermingle, evolve and grow to influence the human condition. Moreover, I have experienced my own share of anomalous phenomena and paranormal events, although I was already an open-minded believer before these experiences. Besides studying, writing and researching history, I have found that I have an innate feel for history, as if I directly experience what I write about, feel and understand the flow of ideas and knowledge between people as time passes over the longer hall of history. Together, these interests have driven me even deeper into studies of the human psyche, which has directly affected the physics in which I practice and conduct research.

As a scientist, I develop hypotheses and theo-

ries about how the world works, predict new things to look for in nature that no one previously thought existed through specific experiments and more careful observations, but I do not predict the future. As a historian, I am not supposed to predict the future even though I discover and document long ranging historical trends that directly affect the outcome of our futures. This makes putting the two fields together somewhat of a problem, because doing so gives me fairly accurate tools to predict the future as a logical outcome of specific events. Given this ability, I have come to many conclusions regarding both spirituality and consciousness in general, not just human consciousness.

For example, I believe that our 'purpose' in this world is to develop consciousness and add that consciousness to the universe so the universe as a whole can better understand its 'self.' Toward this end, we need to do more than just passively study spirituality and consciousness. We need to actually practice them both in our daily lives and in all of our actions so that we can actively raise our own levels of consciousness toward that day, when the human species reaches a point of emergence for a new consciousness complexity and becomes a spiritually enlightened new species of Humans.

— James E. Beichler, Ph.D.

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Michael E. Tymn, Editor  
641 Keolu Dr.  
Kailua, HI 96734  
(808)262-6604  
metgat@aol.com



For non-editorial matters, contact:

Paul Hauser, J.D., Executive Administrator  
P. O. Box 84  
Loxahatchee, Florida, 33420 USA  
(561) 714-1423  
pauljhauser@gmail.com  
<http://www.ascsi.org/>

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### Words of Wisdom

"Life is a journey up a spiral staircase; as we grow older we cover the ground we have covered before, only higher up; as we look down the winding stair below us we measure our progress by the number of places where we were but no longer are. The journey is both repetitious and progressive; we go both round and upward."

— William Butler Yeats





## Searchlight Media Watch



Tom and Lisa Butler, NST

**The Dying Brain:** Thirty patients at a Port Kembla hospital in Australia allowed palliative care researchers to put brain monitors on their head as they died, hoping to contribute to the scant knowledge of the dying brain. And the results are striking; they suggest that, for many people, the final seconds of life bring a last, powerful, surge of activity in the brain.

Dr. Barbato and his colleagues used bispectral (BIS) index monitoring, which is commonly used to measure sedation under anesthetic. It has a 0-100 scale, where 100 is full awareness, 50 is deep sedation or sleep, and 0 is brain death. Twenty-two patients had a spike from their baseline of an average 31 points. Ten of them had a spike of 40-50 points above their baseline. In only eight patients was the spike absent or smaller than 10 points. *"You see the line hovering at around 50, and all of a sudden it jumps to 80 or sometimes 90, almost consistent with the wide-awake state, and then it drops right off to zero,"* Dr. Barbato said.

Research is just a small part of Dr. Barbato's vocation. He was attracted to palliative care after the loss of his baby daughter, Moira, to SIDS, almost 40 years ago, an experience that still leaves his eyes teary and his voice shaking. Now, having retired from clinical practice, he runs courses called Midwifing Death, hoping to teach care givers how to support the dying, which, in its essence, involves being attuned to the needs of the dying person, and supporting them in the kind of death they want.

Text extracted from: Baker, Jordan. "Dying patients study reveals 'brain surge' in final moments of life." *The Sunday Telegraph*. 2017. [ntnews.com.au/news/national/dying-patients-study-reveals-brain-surge-in-final-moments-of-life/news-story/8a98ba1ee542f7fbe63aa90805cd8521](http://ntnews.com.au/news/national/dying-patients-study-reveals-brain-surge-in-final-moments-of-life/news-story/8a98ba1ee542f7fbe63aa90805cd8521)

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**Meaning in the Words of the Dying:** Linguist and educator Lisa Smartt says that she sat in stunned silence as her skeptical and rationalist father described seeing angels in his last days of life. Three days before dying, he announced, *"The angels say only three days left now."* He spoke of a *green dimension* and his room crowded with people who were unseen to her.

Trained in linguistics, Lisa was deeply curious about the language she witnessed. Her father's final words painted a world unseen but were rich in language patterns that appeared to be unique to end of

life. When Lisa discovered little or no research had been done into people's final words, she established *The Final Words Project* (2014) with Dr. Raymond Moody to learn more.

The Final Words Project is collecting stories and you can help by submitting your loved one's final utterances for research and publication. They are most interested in learning about any words that were puzzling or confusing. They also want to know about words that made sense to or touched you in some way. Your submission will contribute to our better understanding of the language at end of our physical life.

Text extracted from: *The Final Words Project*. [final-wordsproject.org/](http://final-wordsproject.org/). See website for information.

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**More Dream at End of Life:** In a study conducted at a hospice center in Buffalo, New York, researchers found that dying people have a lot more dream activity than normal. Eighty-eight percent of the study's participants claimed to have dreams or visions that felt more real than normal dreams, and they often carried on into the waking state. Most people dreamed about reuniting with people they knew who had already died, others said they dreamed about preparing to travel somewhere, and some re-witnessed meaningful experiences from their past. For many of these people, their dreams and visions comforted them and decreased their fear of death.

From: Allan, Patrick. "What It Feels Like to Die." *Life Hacker*. 2017. [lifehacker.com/what-it-feels-like-to-die-1798643965](http://lifehacker.com/what-it-feels-like-to-die-1798643965)

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**Proof of Nature's Calming Effect:** A study has found a novel way to reduce violence by prisoners in solitary confinement: Show them nature videos. Prisoners who viewed ocean waves, waterfalls, aquariums and other serene images were 26 percent less likely to be disciplined for violence than a control group that did not watch the videos, according to research led by a forest ecologist and published Friday in the journal *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*.

The concept originated with Nalini Nadkarni, a professor at the University of Utah, and was premised on research that people with regular exposure to nature, or even



images of nature, were calmer. In 2013, Oregon officials invited her to bring the idea to the state's biggest prison, the Snake River Correctional Institution. The viewing space — and the project itself — became known as the Blue Room, for the glow of the videos. After *Time Magazine* named it one of the top 25 inventions of 2014, select maximum-security units in Washington, Florida and Alaska set up their own Blue Rooms.

From: Denson, Bryan. "Researchers figure out how to calm inmates in solitary confinement: Nature videos." *Los Angeles Times*. 2017. Researchers figure out how to calm inmates in solitary confinement: Nature videos <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-inmate-nature-videos-20170901-story.html>

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**Surprising Pet Benefits:** The social and emotional benefits of pet ownership are many: companionship, affection, unconditional love and entertainment, to name a few. Children raised with pets are more likely to be empathetic and social than kids without pets.

Recent research has also uncovered some surprising physical and psychological benefits of pet ownership for children and adults. And many of the positive effects are not just limited to dogs and cats, but rabbits, rodents, birds, fish, lizards and other pets as well. Here are six of these health benefits:

\*Pets can help prevent eczema and some allergies in children.

\*People who own pets make fewer trips to the doctor than those who don't.

\*Pet owners tend to have lower cholesterol and triglyceride levels than people who don't have pets.

\*Petting pets has been shown to reduce blood pressure and heart rates in adults.

\*Regardless of age, people who have pets, especially dogs, get more exercise than non-pet owners.

\*Last but not least, dog and cat owners are significantly more likely to survive heart attacks than non-pet owners, regardless of the severity of the heart attacks.

Text extracted from: Liebmann-Smith, Joan Ph.D. "Pet Dogs And Cats: 6 Health Benefits." *Huffington Post*. 2011. [huffingtonpost.com/joan-liebmannsmith-phd/6-health-benefits-of-owning-pets\\_b\\_795430.html](http://huffingtonpost.com/joan-liebmannsmith-phd/6-health-benefits-of-owning-pets_b_795430.html)

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**A Police Chief's Guidance to the Grieving "Go See a Medium":** A police chief in Rhode Island gives out advice for those who have lost a loved one: "Seek a connection to the afterlife by meeting with a medium." John LaCross, the police chief in the



Providence suburb of Barrington, lost his 21-year-old brother Joey to suicide nearly 40 years ago. Seeking comfort, he began meeting with people calling themselves mediums. Years later, he met with another medium who he says correctly described his brother's timing and cause of death, down to the manner: hanging. "But can you give me his name?" LaCross said he asked. "It's a J name; Joseph," LaCross said the medium responded. It wasn't the evidence he usually dealt with as a cop — wiretaps, witness corroboration, fingerprints — but it was enough to convince him. Now, after waiting several months until they have absorbed the loss, he recommends mediums to people he judges are in pain and would be open to the idea. "More than half the time, people come back and they tell me they are thankful that they went to see a medium," LaCross said.

From: Hutchinson, Marina. "A police chief's guidance to the grieving: GO SEE A MEDIUM." *Rutland Herald*. 2017. [rutlandherald.com/articles/a-police-chiefs-guidance-to-the-grieving-go-see-a-medium/](http://rutlandherald.com/articles/a-police-chiefs-guidance-to-the-grieving-go-see-a-medium/)

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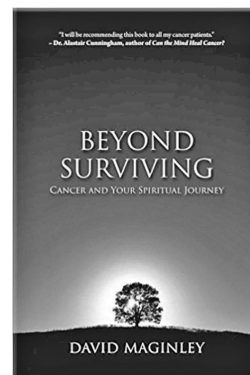
**Beyond Surviving: Cancer and Your Spiritual Journey.** From the book: "David Maginley has been there — four times. His cancer led to a near-death experience and a career helping thousands face this disease. Through profound storytelling, David brings you to the core of the cancer journey to discover the hero within. In *Beyond Surviving*, you will learn how to:

- Turn the mind into an ally as you grapple with uncertainty.
- Improve your spiritual health through love, rather than belief.
- Equip yourself to not only go through cancer, but grow through cancer.

Imagine becoming a warrior of compassion who uses cancer to forge meaning in suffering, heal the heart and amplify life. *Beyond Surviving* guides you to use the crisis for conscious creation of something even greater than survival."

From the Herald interview: "It's important because the hardest moments of our lives are also the ones that contain the greatest potential for transformation and growth," Maginley says. "I'm always saying to patients, don't waste the crisis. Don't just get through cancer and put it behind you. Use it to go deeper and repair the broken parts of life." ... "We always start with, 'Why me? Why did I get cancer?'" said Maginley. "But a better question is, 'How can I deal with this and grow from it?' I hope I can help answer that."

From: The Amazon "Coping with cancer—spiritually." *The Chronicle Herald Lifestyles*. 2017. <http://thechronicleherald.ca/artslife/1473340-coping-with-cancer-%E2%80%94spiritually>



## INTERVIEW

*From page 1*

of them were precognitive — something, which I thought was impossible.”

Prior to the accident, Beecher enjoyed shooting. “I used to shoot game every winter during the season, and clays during the rest of the year,” he continues the story. “Two months after the accident my friend called me because we had some shooting days coming up that we’d booked the previous year. I told him I couldn’t go because there was no way I could shoot an animal or even kill a fly anymore. I remember he was puzzled and he said to me, ‘You’ve been killing them for years, what’s changed?’ It was a good question and one I couldn’t easily answer at that time. All I knew was there was no way I would shoot an animal. At the time I didn’t connect this new feeling or the dreams to the head trauma. Since that time I’ve never had the inclination to pick up a gun.”

In 2002, Beecher was journaling and writing about an old friend named Brian, who had died in his house in 1988 from a head trauma. “I was writing about how if I’d have made a different decision that day, such as taking him to hospital, he might be alive now. It had been a while since I’d thought about him.” Beecher then went into the kitchen to make some toast. When he plugged the toaster in, he blew a fuse and knocked out the kitchen wiring. Nothing more was thought of this until a few days later when his sister, Nicky, called to tell him that she had recently become reacquainted with an old school friend called Johnny and his wife, Michelle (a pseudonym for privacy purposes). Nicky insisted that Michelle wanted to talk with her brother. While Beecher found it a very strange request, especially since he did not know Johnny or Michelle, he made the call. Michelle told him that her grandfather had recently died and she had been to see a medium as a result. “As I was listening I was wondering what my sister had got me into,” Beecher says. “As I said earlier, I had no interest or belief in anything like that back then.”

Michelle told him that after receiving some evidential communication from her grandfather, someone named Brian came through, saying he had a message for Jon. While Michelle had never heard of Brian, she thought the Jon being referred to might be her husband, Johnny, and so she took the information. When she got home and started relating the message to Johnny, he interrupted her and said he didn’t think the message was for him. However, he recalled that his friend Nicky had a brother called Jon and that he had a friend named Brian who had died in his house.

The medium told Michelle that Brian was tall and blonde (correct), that he sold jewelry, (also correct) and that the message was that Brian knew Jon had been thinking about him during the past few days (correct) and that he shouldn’t worry about what happened because although his death looked like an accident, it was his time to leave. “The conversation went on for a while, and at the end she said the medium also told her there was a problem with the kitchen electrics,” Beecher adds. “Michelle said she was so convinced she called an electrician who went to her home but found nothing wrong. I asked her when she had visited the medium and I told her my kitchen electrics had blown a few days later.”

Beecher couldn’t quite believe what he had just heard, but he was certain that his sister was not into such pranks and was even more certain that his sister knew nothing about his thinking and writing about Brian that week or the electrical problem he had experienced. In the mean time, he was still trying to understand why he felt so different about everything and started reading life after death literature, including the books of Arthur Findlay and some skeptical books, such as James Randi’s *Flim Flam*. “I came across an article by Kenneth Ring about people who had had near-death experiences. The article listed a number of after-effects NDEers typically experience and I realized I could tick every one. I came to the conclusion I’d had an NDE but I have no memory of it. I didn’t feel close to death although I was told by the doctor that given the force needed to do the damage I’d done to my face, I was lucky to be alive.”

In 2003, a little over two years after the accident, Beecher decided to find a medium. He went to the Arthur Findlay College website and saw a listing for one not far from where he lived. He recalls her name as Brenda. “On the day of the sitting I wasn’t hoping any particular person would come through, I was just curious to see what would happen,” he relates. “We sat for a few minutes and she told me my father was there, and my uncle on my mother’s side. She said my father’s energy was strong and suggested we should concentrate on him.”

Brenda said, “You didn’t live with him when you were growing up.” She went on to describe what he looked like, his mannerisms, what sort of man he was. “That meant nothing to me, because my mother and father had separated when I was two years old. I grew up with my stepfather and I didn’t meet my father until I was an adult. I met him four times and two of those were just before he died in 2001.”

Beecher vividly recalls that Brenda then said, “He wants to show you something so you’ll know



it's him," and with that she held her hand out and said that he had put a pigeon in her hand. "That was a big moment for me, because the only memory I had of my father was pigeons, and at his funeral I met my uncle (father's brother) for the first time. During our conversation, the uncle told me that he and my father used to raise and race pigeons, and there was a pigeon loft in the back garden of the house I lived in as a two-year-old."

"I couldn't see how she could possibly know any of this by cold reading or any other materialist explanation," Beecher continues. "Up to that point, I'd felt the accident and my subsequent change in worldview had been thrust upon me, but now I decided it was all part of some plan, and that was fine."

Within the next few years, Beecher got divorced, left his business, became a vegetarian, did voluntary work, stopped buying sport cars, bought a Bible, and met with mediums, remote viewers, priests, parapsychologists, and others associated with spirituality and the paranormal. "People who report having near-death experiences or spiritually transformative events often claim they 'know' we don't really die, and they know this and that. I understand exactly how they feel. I know what I know. That said, my logical brain tells me psychiatric hospitals are full of people who think they know things the rest of us don't, but nevertheless, I have that knowing. Maybe that's what faith is. It's hard to explain."

Two of the mediums he visited told him that they saw him publishing books about spirituality and life after death, which he had never considered at the time, and one day he woke up with the name "White Crow Books" in his head and went from there. *A Dog's View* was inspired by taking care of his parents' two dogs after they both had strokes and were unable to take care of them. "I was walking the dogs on the beach during March 2016, and at a certain moment a story came into my mind — a story about dogs knowing more than we think they know, and acting as guides, helping humans move toward a state of unconditional love. A scene came into my mind of a man jumping from a parking lot structure. Before that moment I'd never had any inclination or desire to write a story — not ever, but I went home and wrote down that scene. The following day I took the dogs to the beach again and another scene came to mind and I went home and wrote it down. This went on for eleven weeks and by then I had the first draft of a story. No one was more surprised than me."

As for his pen name, J. R. Archer, Beecher explains that Archer is his birth name, and while his

father and grandparents were not in his life while they were alive, they've helped him enormously since they "died." The pen name is to honor them. He cites a reading he had with a medium from Belgium named Isabelle Duchene a few years ago. Isabelle told him that she had his "father's father here," and he was telling her that he was very interested in Jon's work and what he was doing. It was somewhat surprising to Beecher as he had never known his paternal grandparents and they had passed away many years before. He told her that he didn't even know their names. Within a few minutes, the medium gave him the names Edward and Maria. Later that day, Beecher checked with a younger half-brother who confirmed that these were the names of his grandparents. "A few people have said they are common names and it may have been a lucky guess," he says. "One name might be a lucky guess, but getting both names was remarkable, especially when you consider I didn't know their names."

On another occasion, Isabelle told him his mother's mother was there, and said she was with her sister Louisa and someone named Bill. The message from Louisa via the medium claimed Jon's mother was feeling very negative at that time and not revealing why, adding, "She must have the eye test." Beecher was unaware that his maternal grandmother had a sister named Louisa, but, in checking with his mother, found out that the sister's name was Louisa and that the grandmother's brother was named Bill. "The suggestion that my mother was feeling very negative didn't make sense to me because my mother is a very positive person and she hadn't ever mentioned having any eye problems, but when I contacted her later that day she confessed that some months before she had been diagnosed with cataracts, a condition later requiring surgery but before it could happen she needed to have an eye test," Beecher recalls. "She hadn't told anyone, including my stepfather, about the problem, nor had she had the eye test, because she was afraid to have the surgery."

When asked if those experiences and a number of others too detailed to go into here have given him a belief in God and an afterlife, Beecher responds, paraphrasing the eminent Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, "I don't need to believe, I know."

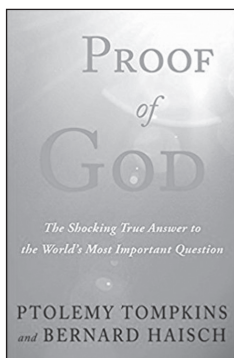
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*White Crow Books, under the broad umbrella of world spirituality, offers old and new paperback books, audio books, E-books, and blogs by a number of current authors. Its website can be found at <http://whitecrow-books.com>*



**Proof of God: The Shocking True Answer to the World's Most Important Question, by Ptolemy Tompkins and Bernard Haisch, Howard Books, New York, 2017, 249 pages**

An undisclosed friend of Bernard Haisch, an astrophysicist from the University of California at Berkeley, recommended that “Bernie” contact Ptolemy Tompkins, a well-known writer on spirituality to obtain help on translating Haisch’s books into more readable prose. Tompkins, who identifies himself as a professional writer (not editor) responded with a counter offer that the two of them write a book together. Haisch accepted the offer. Tompkins then read Haisch’s two books, *The Purpose Guided Universe* and *The God Theory*, and flew to California to interview Haisch and then returned East to write the book.



The “Most Important Question” they address is: Is there evidentiary proof of God’s existence and, if so, what is it? This question by its very nature raises epistemological issues such as what type of knowledgeable evidence and how much of it would be required to constitute “proof.” However, this empirical methodology question is never fully addressed by the authors. Haisch from the outset states that he doesn’t “know” God is a reality but is 99 percent certain that God exists. Tompkins offers his own opinions and throughout the book quotes Haisch.

Tompkins initially takes a very subjective approach, beginning with his own childhood perceptions. He states that he remembers the feeling of sureness about the existence of a spiritual world that he experienced so strongly up to the age of eight. Later in his life, through experiences he encountered while attending Alcoholics Anonymous sessions, he learned “full well” what his “higher power” was. “It was that same presence that that had been hovering just behind the scenes my whole life. You could call it what you want, perhaps, but I knew its name was God.”

Haisch, coming from a devout German Catholic family of first generation immigrants to the US, also believed in God from childhood. He has long believed that science and religion are two parts of a single domain suggesting that the concepts the two

authors planned to propound in the book would make equal sense to both scientists and theologians.

In a concluding chapter entitled “Bernie’s Proofs,” Haisch offers his rationale for believing that God exists. “First,” he says, “there’s the Big Bang itself. It should not be forgotten how recent this theory is, or how powerful an argument is for the existence of the Creator... If there’s anything that the Big Bang *is not*, it’s evidence *against* God’s existence... The universe ‘exploded’ out of a point-like, multimillion-degree ‘thing’ called a singularity, which contained all the energy in the universe to be. This is about as strong validation of the theological concept of *creation ex nihilo*, or ‘creation out of nothing’ as you could ask for.”

Bernie further cites “the finely tuned nature of the universe,” its Grand Design, and the “moral dimension,” i.e., the innate sense of goodness that people have. In the final chapter, Tompkins postulates his three keys: “1. The physical world is not real. It is not substantive. It feels that way, and it looks that way, but it isn’t. There’s nothing in it, because there’s no such thing as solid matter. 2. Consciousness is the only reality in our universe. Matter, energy, space... All these things are only simulations, generated by God using the soul and single ‘thing’ in his universe that actually exists. The world of objects we move through is not conscious, we are. And because we are conscious, we are real. 3. Love is real and connects us all.”

In his “Shocking True Answer” Tompkins declares (1) the physical world to be “not real” because the apparent solidity of matter is an illusion for the reason that matter’s most authentic subatomic reality consists of immensely vast spaces between very tiny electrons, protons and neutrons swirling around in their huge orbits; (2) “Consciousness is the only reality in our universe... And because we are conscious we are real”; and (3) “Love is real and connects us all.”

In sum, *Proof of God* is pretty tough slogging. But the two authors deserve a lot of credit making the extraordinary effort they did to simplify their nearly incomprehensible subject matter in such a workmanlike manner while so nicely holding the attention of most of their readers who from page one might very well feel – while sorting through the book’s massive collection of complicated evidence – that they are precariously located at the deep end of a natatorium without knowing how to swim. Also, calling all solid matter illusory is disturbing.

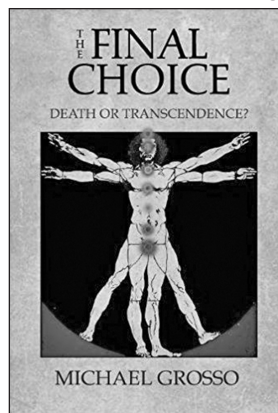
– David Stang



### The Final Choice: Death or Transcendence?

by Michael Grosso, White Crow Books, UK, 2017, 226 pages

This book examines humanity's attitude toward death – from embracing it, as some mystics have done, to escaping from it, as is so common among the masses today. "Beneath the ceaseless changes of history, death remains a changeless fact of life," author Michael Grosso, Ph.D., states in the Introduction. "The fact is constant; the meaning varies from culture to culture and from age to age. We are at present living through a twilight of worldviews, and nobody quite has the answers, in spite of science, to the perennial questions and great mysteries of life and death." He adds that book is born of the discontent with the materialism of the ruling classes in many places, a discontent that ends "with the core image of nothingness waiting to swallow us up in the last act."



The book is a revision of Grosso's 1985 book with many updates, including much discussion of the near-death experience (NDE) along with recognition of the increasing risks of mass destruction. I happened to be in the middle of the book, in my Hawaii home, when my wife's cell phone beeped and an emergency text alert came through from the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency (HEMA) saying that a ballistic missile was inbound and to seek immediate shelter. Of course, it turned out to be a false alarm, someone pushing the wrong button in the HEMA headquarters, but the mistake certainly highlighted Grosso's concerns about the world situation.

Grosso has taught humanities and philosophy at Marymount Manhattan College, City University of New York, and New Jersey City University and is affiliated with the Division of Perceptual Studies at the University of Virginia. He has authored five other books, including *The Man Who Could Fly*, reviewed in the December issue.

Grosso notes that while there is an ever increasing abundance of research, coming to us from mediumship, near-death experiences, reincarnation studies, and deathbed phenomena, suggestive of postmortem survival, belief in an afterlife seems to be at an all-time low. This, he sees, as being the result, in great part, of practical materialism in everyday life leaving little space to encounter the transcendent. In earlier societies, before all the technological advances we have witnessed in recent decades,

consciousness was much more permeable to alternate realities. As I read Grosso's words, I imagined a scene from 1800s, before electronic distractions, in which the woman of the house was knitting and her husband whittling before a fireplace, both frequently staring into the flames and allowing spirit influence to permeate the consciousness and settle in the subconscious.

"Brainwashed by mainstream scientific materialism, we feel constrained by their ideas of what is possible," Grosso explains. "Tied to constricted worldviews, we submit to the status quo, however soul-deadening. Faced with more idealistic possibilities, we respond with passive skepticism." Materialism, he goes on, neglects the unseen dimension and serves to keep us distracted and unaware of the Transcendent.

Leo Tolstoy's classic story of Ivan Ilych is cited as perhaps a typical ending for many non-believers. A judge by profession, Ilych looked to pleasure, status and power as his gods, until his world began to crumble as he approached death and what he saw as an abyss of nothingness.

The NDE, Grosso opines, is a "metaphysical paradigm-buster," a phenomenon that points increasingly toward undermining the mechanistic universe subscribed to by mainstream science. In Chapter Five, he summarizes a number of NDEs, pointing out how the standard debunking theory of oxygen deprivation does not explain them. "Consciousness delocalized suggests the possibility of a prolonged or even permanent out-of-body experience – also known as the *afterlife*," Grosso offers, also telling of two of his own out-of-body experiences in which he found himself light, mobile, electric, and ecstatic, at the same time feeling angst over his concern about getting lost in mental space.

Grosso quotes from a paper written by a student in one of his classes, after he had introduced the class to types of evidence for an afterlife. "The greatest problem that death presents, in my opinion, is its finality," Mary, the student, wrote. "When I began this course I had feelings of anger, desperation, fear and confusion. My daughter, age six, is dying of leukemia. Her fears were hard enough to deal with, but compounded by my own fears the task was next to impossible....[but] now I feel that when the end comes, I will still feel pain but I also feel that my child may go on to another dimension." Mary goes on to say that she has conveyed some of the evidence to her daughter and that her daughter now seems more relaxed and her anxiety diminished.

If nothing else, the evidential stories gave the mother and daughter hope that death was not the end. If only our world leaders could understand what Grosso so astutely explains.

– Michael Tymn

**The Cloud Of Unknowing**, by an anonymous English monk (This is considered one of the great classics of Western spirituality and has been republished by various publishers over the past seven centuries, as late as 2017. This review is based on a translation by James Walsh, S. J., published in 1981 by Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 293 pages.)

This book was authored by an English Apophatic Carthusian monk and spiritual director of younger monks in his monastery whom he taught spiritual exercises during the late fourteenth century. The primary message of Apophatic spirituality is that God is totally beyond the capacity of human understanding and that any intellectualizing about the nature of God is a total waste of time. That view also holds that monks should seek *experience* rather than *knowledge* of God by striving to reach a “unitive” state with God. This Apophatic spiritual pathway stresses contemplation. The “cloud of unknowing” is an imagined cloud between one’s consciousness and the presence of God.



The ultimate spiritual objective in many Eastern religions is unity with the Divine. In Hinduism, for example, it is a state of liberation or illumination characterized by the extinction of an individual consciousness as it merges into *Brahman*, the eternal Absolute. In Buddhism, the state of perfect blessedness is the goal of all spiritual practice. Hindu and Buddhist spiritual seekers employ meditation as the pathway to Nirvana, where one is freed from suffering, death and rebirth, and all other worldly bonds.

Modern-day Eastern monks as well as Christian seekers of this state of consciousness often refer to it as a unitive experience. The website *World Scriptures* defines a unitive state as encompassing “both union with God or Absolute Reality and union with all existence, the dissolution of subject and object, knower and known.”

Christian monastics who affirmatively seek unitive experiences refer to their method or spiritual practice of attaining that goal as “contemplation” rather than “meditation.” Contemplation is prayerful concentrated attention. The two most common Christian pathways, or spiritual exercises, seeking unity with the Divine are known as Kataphatic spirituality and Apophatic spirituality. The former encompasses intellectual learning and knowledge about God such that he is omnipotent and omniscient, also all loving, good and merciful, among other traits. Apophatic spirituality, on the other

hand, holds that knowledge of the Divine is totally beyond the capacity of human understanding.

In chapter IV, the author explains that God is much too complex for us to understand and that we should put all concepts, theories, or ideas of God out of mind and reach up toward God with a loving heart, seeking that he, by his grace, will give us a unitive experience through the simplicity of contemplation. If God wants us to have a unitive experience he’ll shoot down some bliss through the cloud of unknowing. The most we can expect, based upon our own intent and desire, is to perceive that a cloud is separating us from a direct face to face contact with God. If while reaching toward God in a love-filled, mentally blanked-out state of unknowing the mind gets cluttered up with thoughts, including rational thoughts, the author says we should dump them into the cloud of forgetting which is a mental rubbish basket of sorts. This is what the Eastern monks often do when they get distracted during their meditations.

In Chapter XXVI, our mystical author explains that all rational creatures have in them a knowing power and a loving power, and that God is always incomprehensible to the first. “But to the second, which is the loving power, he is entirely comprehensible in each one individually; in so much that one loving soul of itself, because of love, would be able to comprehend him who is entirely sufficient, and much more so, without limit, to fill all the souls of men and angels that could ever exist. This is the everlasting miracle of love, which shall never have an end.”

How does the “cloud of unknowing” fit into this spiritual practice? The author further says that you should “labor earnestly for a short while, and beat upon this high cloud of unknowing, and then take your rest. For whoever is to become accustomed to this exercise will have hard labor... unless he receive a very special grace.” Here, again, he states that the experience is beyond words, but for the person who perseveres “he will show you some of his secrets, of which man may not or cannot speak. Then you shall feel your affection all aflame with the fire of his love...”

As a personal note, for years I could not understand how or why Yogis from India could spend nearly 24 hours a day in unitive trance states. But that, in essence, is what the Cloud’s author recommends to the monks he teaches Apophatic spiritual exercises.

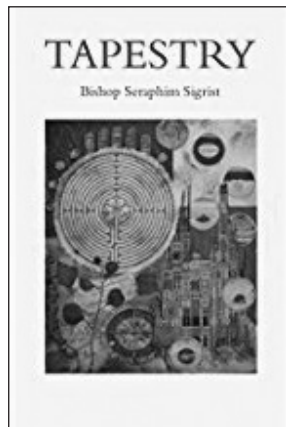
Our Academy is exclusively devoted to spiritual and consciousness studies. If you are interested in learning more about the phenomenology of the Apophatic pathway to a unitive state with the Divine, then *The Cloud Of Unknowing* is certainly worth reading.

– David Stang

**Tapestry**, by Bishop Seraphim Sigrist, Lumin Press, Clinton, NJ, 2017, 135 pages

Seraphim Sigrist is an American bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church who served in Japan for several decades as a missionary monk. Contrary to the traditional monastic values which reject the world as hopelessly corrupted by Original Sin and thereby renounce worldly lifestyles by escaping to a monastery isolated from society, he chose instead to spend thousands of hours reading the great treasures of Japanese literature, poetry and philosophy. He resided and worked within secular Japanese society non-judgmentally seeking to better comprehend its world view. In this book he remarkably avoids contentious and condescending side-taking concerning the bifurcation of sacred and secular, pagan and Christian, and instead seeks aesthetically and spiritually to integrate these polar opposites. Most impressive to me is his own incredibly broad and comprehensive spectrum of consciousness. His writing reveals an extraordinary sensitivity and nuanced perceptivity regarding so many realms: the visually aesthetic, sonorous poetic, mundane, philosophical, psychological and transcendental.

Sigrist's insights are as solid as they are poetic. For example, in chapter I he notes, "Certain it is that in our lives we at each moment make large and small choices leaving path after path unchosen which would have been possible." In chapter III he observes, "Job 28 says that wisdom is indeed in God but in its fullness beyond the knowledge of death or of life... So the ends of things are not always at some seemingly linear end of a progression but can be at any time where the deep sense of the progression becomes evident. May we say at any thin place where the light beyond visible light shines through." In the next chapter he selects this tale from the esoteric *Pseudopigrapha*: "The 3rd book of Enoch tells us, 'This Enoch, whose flesh is turned to flame, his veins to fire, his eyes-lashes to flashes of lightning, his eye-balls to flaming torches, and who God placed on a throne next to the throne of glory, received after this heavenly transformation the name Metatron.'... So Enoch is the sign of the dawn; and youth, measurement, the fullness of humanity at home in the world. And most of all he is that mystery of humanity as at home in Time and re-deeming Time." Sigrist's comparison between a good detective and a good priest in chapter VII is not focused on how they are different but rather



how they are similar.

His last chapter, XIX, is titled *Labyrinth* – that circuitous, symbolic and mysterious flag stone pathway to Divine Truth. In it he concludes, "Indeed the life of my mind and heart may seem all puzzling maze with paths that lead here to a dead end, or there to an endless loop, or yet again back out to the beginning. Some inner paths may lead to goals we recognize as our own and yet which attained are but secondary and do not satisfy. Some inner corridors are light and some are dark. The inner world indeed may come to seem a desolate, puzzling place, mere maze of neurons with no real exit, a sort of prison or yet again as barren as the desert those first monks entered... But there in the air is the true labyrinth, the mottled shimmering rose of cloud, its patterns and paths ever changing, and now fading over the Cathedral into the morning light... there all the rose light of Tennyson's Grail... there surely the true and straight paths of the true labyrinth... now withdrawing and gone in the glimmering sky..."

What is the essence or essential core of what Sigrist is trying to tell us? He quotes Sergei Fudel, a Russian scholar: "In the hymns of St. Sergius of Radonezh we say that he lived his bodily life spiritually, spent his days on earth as if it were heaven, communed with people as if they were angels, and his own world was otherworldly. Perhaps we do not want to live like this but each of us must try, within the measure of his strength."

Consider that Grail seeking axiom within the context of what it was like to be a Russian Orthodox priest or Bishop since Stalin began leading the Soviet Union. Sigrist reports on his travels "from Moscow to Butovo a place to the south of Moscow which was a killing ground used by the Communist for people from the Moscow area, and in particular in 1937 and 1938... There is a new church and a bell tower there and stones with inscriptions of many names of those murdered here." Ten thousand are known but countless others unknown. Included are 900 bishops and priests. How could a man whose multitude of holy and innocent brother clerics had been so cruelly slain radiate so much light? Read *Tapestry* and decide for yourself.

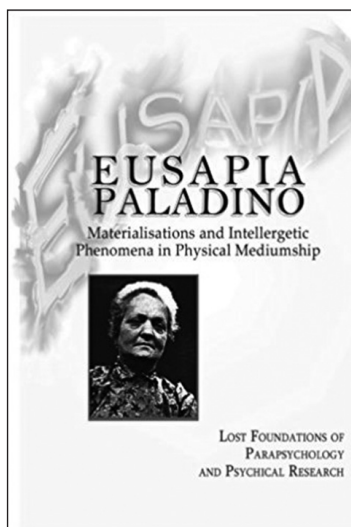
– David Stang

"The author gathers compelling ideas from a wide range of sources: classics of international literature, mythology, great Christian writers of ancient times and of our own times, as well as his own experience. I marvel at the broad and deep knowledge displayed by this wise man. His openness and compassion shine through the text. Ultimately this is a book about spirituality, deeply rooted in Christian faith but open to the insights of other traditions." (From a review at Amazon.com by Fr. John L. Bostwick, Canon of St. Norbert Abbey)



**Eusapia Paladino: Materialisations and Intellergetic Phenomena in Physical Mediumship, compiled and edited by Scott Dickerson**, Lost Foundations of Parapsychology and Psychical Research, 2016, 220 pages (available on Kindle)

According to a number of Internet references, Eusapia Paladino (also spelled “Palladino”) was nothing more than a charlatan, a fake, an impostor – someone pretending to have mediumistic abilities by using sleight of hand (and foot) trickery. But most of the modern references are written by debunkers and other “know-nothings” whose minds are made up in opposition to any psychic phenomena. They focus on the negative reports only while ignoring the positive reports and failing to consider explanations that fall outside of known scientific paradigms.



It is unlikely that any medium in the history of psychical research was studied by more men (and a few women) of science than Paladino. Dozens of scientists and scholars – from Italy, France, Poland, Great Britain, and the United States – observed her under controlled conditions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This book is an anthology of reports by a number of those scientists, primarily the reports of several distinguished Italian researchers.

“The phenomena occurring with Eusapia constitute an assemblage of physical manifestations which appear to contradict the know principles of biology,” Dr. Joseph Venzano is quoted from the August 1907 issue of the *Annals of Psychical Research*. He goes on to state that he observed many materializations, both complete and incomplete ones. “These forms in a very few cases, are perceptible to the sight in full light; less rarely they can be seen in semi-obscurity when the room is dimly lighted by tinted lamps.”

Levitations of both person and furniture were also reported on numerous occasions, perhaps the most impressive ones involving Paladino herself being levitated to the top of a table while seated in a chair. Dr. Cesare Lombroso, a world-renowned neuropathologist known for his studies in criminal behaviour, reported that on September 28, 1892, he was seated on one side of Paladino and holding her hand (for control purposes) while Professor Charles

Richet, later a Nobel Prize winner in medicine, held her hand on the other side. As Lombroso explained it, Paladino, while in a trance state, complained of invisible hands grasping her under the arms. Then her voice changed and said, “Now I lift my medium up on the table.”

Paladino was then raised (still seated) to the top of the table amid groans and lamentations on her part. The researchers then observed her deposited back on the floor with the same security and precision. The voice speaking through Paladino’s vocal cords was said to be that of John King, her spirit guide who reportedly took control of her body during her trance states.

A similar levitation was reported to have taken place on May 25, 1900 with Enrico Morselli, a neurologist and professor at the University of Genoa, controlling Paladino’s hand and foot on one side and Professor Francesco Porro, a world-renowned astronomer, controlling on her other side. Morselli reported that Paladino was raised to the top of the table “in such a way that her feet and two front legs of the chair rested on the surface of the table,” after which she groaned, as if intensely frightened, and then asked (apparently John King) to be placed back on the floor. As she was descending, she “was carried up again,” before being lowered to the floor. This all took place under dim but adequate lighting. It was further noted by Morselli that they waited patiently for some 90 minutes before various phenomena began happening.

Some of the séances observed by the many researchers were in good light, some in dim light, and some in the dark. Because of the sensitivity of ectoplasm to light, the best phenomena were produced under dark conditions with a red lantern permitting the sitters to observe adequately.

By 1903, Lombroso had observed Paladino many more times, but at a sitting with her in Genoa in 1903, he experienced something new. Before Paladino entered the trance state, Lombroso asked her for some special manifestation that day and he got it as his deceased mother materialized, spoke to him, and kissed him. Lombroso added that his mother reappeared at least 20 times in subsequent sittings, although less distinct than on that first occasion.

All of the researchers quoted in this book seem to have been convinced that the phenomena produced by (or through) Paladino were genuine and not the result of deception. However, not all of them were prepared to commit to spirits being behind it all. Some preferred to believe that some aspect of Paladino’s subconscious was responsible for it all. That seemed like a much more scientific explanation than spirits of the dead. (See “Practicing Death” column on page 15 for further discussion of the Paladino mediumship.)

– Michael Tymn

**Sacred Signs and Symbols: Awaken to the Messages and Synchronicities That Surround Us**, by Sherrie Dillard, Llewellyn Publishing Co., Wooddale, MN, 251 pages

Many of us have unusual coincidences (synchronicities) or we notice ordinary objects, such as shapes of clouds, birds, songs, coins that seem to catch our attention for a moment. We often don't give it a second thought. However, Sherrie Dillard believes we receive messages of guidance, comfort, inspiration and wake-up calls from these seemingly unimportant signs.

In ancient civilizations and cultures, observing signs and omens was honored and used to make individual and collective decisions. Intuition was given more credence then as a revered sense that could be trusted. Signs were acknowledged as a major part of their lives and even changed the course of history. Particular signs such as comets, eclipses or even seeing an unusual bird or flower could influence an army toward attack or peace depending on how it was interpreted by the observer.

Many divination systems came into being in order to discern the will of spiritual forces. One of the earliest divination systems believed to be followed by Confucius around 1000 B.C. was called the *I Ching* or *Book of Changes*. The Germanic/Norse perceived communication with the gods consisting of 24 stones, tiles, or wooden blocks marked with symbols that were called runes. The first documented Tarot cards appeared in Italy between 143-145 A.D. but may have originated earlier in Egypt and the Kabbalah. Cards used for divination in gaining guidance and understanding are still applied for these purposes.

As the development of science and rational thought advanced, signs, symbols and omens have been relegated to superstition and childish wishful thinking. However, Carl Jung studied the phenomena of meaningful coincidences which he called synchronicity. He observed that dream symbols by his clients often showed up later in their life as unusual coincidences resulting in successful healing outcomes.

Modern scientific advancements, especially quantum physics, have resulted in demonstrating that every single particle in the universe has an effect on every other particle no matter how distant

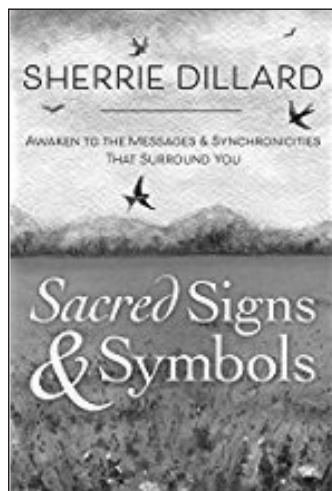
they are from each other. This unified effect could help to explain the synchronicity phenomena. What we think and feel, as well as our intentions, have an influence on the world around us. Dillard recommends, "Let the world speak to you and reveal its guiding presence. Let it come alive and transform random seemingly insignificant events into a treasure trove of insights and meaning." Dillard opines that the more we notice the signs and appreciate their symbolic meanings, the easier it becomes to spot those more often and discern their meaning for us.

To begin, she suggests withholding judgment and any preconceived notions as to what is or is not important. Notice what draws your attention and what comes to mind related to a condition and situation in your life. Signs are often repetitive until we get the message. "Even if you trust and believe that you have experienced a sign or message, there may be a voice within you that would like tangible proof." Unfortunately, there is no certain way to get the proof; however Albert Einstein said, "If at first the idea is not absurd, then there is no hope for it." When we let skepticism close our minds we close the door to the constant emanation of beneficial insights, love and guidance. The signs often come when we least expect them such as during stress, sadness or when a need for choice or decision is imminent. Even though we "don't get it" immediately, insights may come spontaneously later.

So who or what is arranging these seemingly random messages within the signs and synchronicities? In the spirit world there are many messengers such as angels, spirit guides, or loved ones who have passed over, earth and nature spirits, as well as you own higher self. All are striving to communicate and inspire and guide or simply help us to know they exist. Some of the most mundane things that could contain a message are finding feathers especially white ones, or coins, seeing butterflies or odd birds, or undeniably shaped cloud formations, or seeing repeating numbers or songs. Journaling the responses can reveal insights into their meaning. Throughout the book, Dillard provides examples of individuals who have had amazingly meaningful experiences and gotten significant insights and guidance by paying attention to signs and their messages.

The author devotes one section of the book to helpful guidelines in how to invoke signs by casting oneself into the environment to observe and detect signs and messages. Also, there is a large Glossary that provides general meanings of many signs and symbols to assist in interpretation. Dillard offers this summation "A greater presence and power is calling to you and reaching out to offer you support, comfort, laughter, direction and enlightenment. How can you refuse?"

— Glenda Hawley, Ph.D.



**The Fear Factor: How One Emotion Connects Altruists, Psychopaths, & Everyone In-Between**, by Abigail Marsh, Basic Books, NY, 2017, 303 pages

At the very outset of this book, Georgetown University social psychology professor Abigail Marsh tells us that her curiosity about altruism began about 20 years ago with her unidentified rescuer who selflessly saved her life while risking his own in an automobile accident situation. In her book she selected kidney donors who donated their organ to perfect strangers as an extraordinarily altruistic behavior. She tracked them down, tested and interviewed them and reaffirmed that they are the most altruistic living beings. When they each viewed a photograph of a frightened person their amygdala lighted up like a Christmas tree. These huge hearted, heroic kidney donors were placed at one end of Marsh's altruism bell curve. At the opposite end of her bell curve she positioned psychopaths who are unable to perceive fearful facial expressions and completely unable to feel any compassion for frightened persons. She learned from interviewing and laboratory testing that when psychopaths are shown a picture of a person who looks scared their amygdala fails to register anything, not even a tiny spark.

The last chapter of *Fear Factor* pertains to her dedicated efforts to stimulate and encourage the expansion of altruistic acts within our society. Marsh

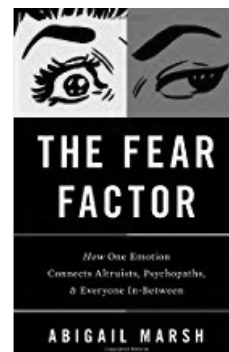
states that, "Altruism motivated by genuine compassion results not only in the glow of accomplishment and satisfaction that accompanies reaching any goal, but also in the vicarious joy that altruism promotes when it is motivated by the genuine desire to improve another's welfare."

The author sought vigorously for methodologies which could stimulate more altruism within our culture. This is what she concluded from her search: "The most robustly supported way to enhance altruism appears to be via either of two related Buddhist practices called compassion and loving-kindness meditation, both of which are basically compassion boot camp."

It was not surprising to her that quite a few of those persons she interviewed who donated their kidney to perfect strangers were Buddhists.

Marsh also discovered that there was another common element in addition to compassion among the organ donors she interviewed. "That humility is the final essential gradient for extraordinary altruism, the ingredient that binds all the others together, helps to explain what I initially found to be a puzzling uniform quality in extraordinary altruist: their intense resistance to all efforts to elevate them with accolades and labels like 'hero.'"

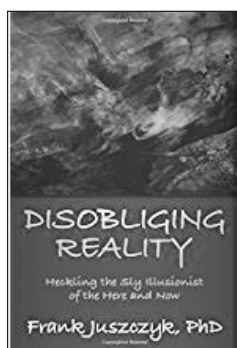
— David Stang



**Disobliging Reality**, by Frank Juszczyk, Ph.D. Archway Publishing, Bloomington, IN, 2016, 98 pages

The author, an Academy member and a professor emeritus of English at Western New Mexico University, warns readers in the Introduction that those without any previous knowledge of quantum physics might find themselves perplexed and disinclined to read beyond the first paragraph. However, he adds that a theoretical physicist would consider it quantum physics at a pretty elementary level.

I'll confess right up front that much of what the author writes in this book went over my head, at least on the first read, sometimes on the second. I usually got the gist of it on the first read, especially when the paradoxes are clearly stated, but I need to visualize things as I read and that required me to go back for a much slower second read. If I am interpreting it all correctly, this book is about realizing that the material world in which we live is not the "real" world. To the extent that there is a



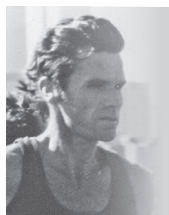
much greater reality, one that few people recognize, the material life is an illusion. I would take that to mean that we "don't see the forest for the trees," but Juszczyk goes beyond that and suggests that we don't see the forest "or" the trees.

"We fear the dangerous potential of the reality with which we are familiar because it contains unknown aspects that can hurt us," Juszczyk explains, "and we fear a completely different reality because its entire nature is unknown to us and is therefore potentially dangerous in all of its aspects." The key to all this, he says, is disobliging the reality we know — "that is inconvenience it by no longer deferring to it and interrupt its unfolding phase so that its enfolding phase becomes apparent." In doing this, "we can enrich our ordinary reality with further dimensions of potential experience now hidden behind that reality's repetitive persistence. We can remove the screen of consensus so we can see and experience what lies beyond."

What it all boils down to, as I see it, is our need to be "walking in two worlds," as Juszczyk put it, as well as "the merging of this and that." That doesn't mean giving up on the unreal life we are living and focusing only on the next life; rather, it means living this life with the greater reality always in mind.

— Michael Tymn





# Practicing Death

*To practice death is to practice freedom* — Michel de Montaigne

Michael Tymn



## Old & New Fake News

*Fake news* is nothing new. Some of worst (or best?) fake news is associated with paranormal phenomena and goes back to at least the latter half of the 19th century. Based on the research carried out by two dozen or more respected scientists and scholars, few people were more disparaged by fake news than Eusapia Palladino (aka Paladino), the renowned Neapolitan medium. The fake news about her continues today at various web sites, where she is made out to be a “clever trickster” and a “total fraudster.” (See book review on page 12)

At *RationalWiki*, we read that Palladino “refused to be investigated in light conditions.” Yet, the various references reporting on the research with Palladino refer to most experiments being carried out in “full light” or “dim light.” Moreover, it is well established in the annals of psychical research that the ectoplasm given off by the medium to produce the phenomena is sensitive to light and negatively affects the phenomena as well as the medium.

“In conclusion, during out sessions neither fraud nor cheating ever occurred,” wrote Professor Filippo Bottazzi, director of the Institute of Experimental Physiology at the Royal University of Naples, of the eight sittings he and several other scientists had with Palladino, during 1907. “I can affirm this with certainty, solemnly, also on behalf of all other participants.” British researcher W. W. Baggally reported that he and the committee he served on observed 470 phenomena during the course of eleven sittings with Palladino, and no fraud was detected.

There were many times when Palladino (or the controlling spirits) failed to produce any phenomenon, and the more skeptical observers saw this as evidence that she was a charlatan. It would take a thick book to deal with all the conflicting information involved in the reporting of the Palladino mediumship, but the overwhelming consensus of those who studied her the most is that she was a true medium producing genuine phenomena. Some believe she might have occasionally cheated when her mediumistic powers failed her, as she did not want to disappoint those in attendance.

But that theory is questioned by some, as Palladino was in a trance state, and the so-called cheating was *unconscious* on her part or was carried out by John King, her spirit guide, who was controlling her body. Phantom arms, also referred to as ectoplasmic rods, and floating hands were often observed by the researchers, seemingly extending from Palladino’s body. The inexperienced researchers took these phantom limbs and hands to be part of Palladino’s bag of tricks,

even though Palladino was searched beforehand and the research was always carried out in places that Palladino did not have access to before the experiments.

Although most researchers recognized that when Palladino went into the trance state and the voice speaking through her claimed to be John King, it would have been scientifically improper for them to accept it as a spirit voice. It was more “scientific” to consider it a “secondary personality” buried in her subconscious. Thus, the researchers would report that “Eusapia said...” rather than “John King said...” or “Eusapia did...” rather than “John King did...” and thereby confuse those reading their reports. It was a Catch 22 situation and their own reluctance to treat John King as a real spirit meant they were shovelling sand against the tide. By refusing to acknowledge spirit involvement in the phenomena, they indirectly and unintentionally supported the debunkers.



*Palladino and levitated table*

Sir William Barrett, the esteemed British physicist, may have summed it best when he explained that in her trance state Palladino was “easy prey” for external influences. “We have no right to assume that she is wholly conscious of [cheating], for Professor [James] Hyslop has shown that mediumship is often accompanied with abnormal bodily as well as mental conditions,” Barrett offered. “We know little or nothing of what constitutes the peculiar faculty or environment for the necessary production of these physical phenomena...We may even conceive that when this psychic force is restricted or not externalized, it may create movements of the limbs of the psychic which will cause her to perform by normal actions (in perhaps a semi-conscious state) what under good psychical conditions would be supernaturally. This would produce the impression of intentional fraud. Everyone who has had much experience in these perplexing investigations knows that what seems purposeless and stupid fraud often intrudes itself, after the most conclusive evidence of genuine phenomena has been obtained. It is this which renders the whole enquiry wholly unfitted for the hasty and unskilled investigator.”



The Academy for Spiritual and Consciousness Studies, Inc.  
P.O. Box 84  
Loxahatchee, FL 33470

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#### MISSION STATEMENT:

The mission of The Academy for Spiritual and Consciousness Studies, Inc. is to discern, develop and disseminate knowledge of how consciousness studies and paranormal phenomena may relate to and enhance the development of the human spirit.

## Beichler Elected Academy President

James E. Beichler, Ph.D., was elected president of the Academy by the board of directors during a meeting on January 17. He replaces Alan Huguenot, Sc.D., who remains on the executive staff as immediate past president.

William Wilson will continue as vice-president, Karin Nemri as treasurer, and Lee Lawrence as assistant treasurer, while Boyce Batey was appointed archivist and historian, a new position. Batey is one of the founding members of the Academy and served as its executive director for 35 years before retiring in 2013.

Beichler taught physics, mathematics, the history and philosophy of science and European history as well as related subjects at the university and college level for more than three decades before retiring. He earned his Ph.D. in 1999 from the Union Institute and University in paraphysics, a branch of theoretical physics. He served as editor of the online journal, *Yggdrasil: the Journal of Paraphysics*, which introduced some of his early theoretical work to the world of the Internet. His book, *To Die For*, was published in 2008 and an updated version is due for release shortly.

"We are planning a smaller than usual conference for 2018, because it is too late to plan a large

meeting," Beichler said of his first order of business. "Hopefully, we can get a published Proceedings from it, which will help define the new direction the Academy is taking to keep up with scientific and other advances in the field of spirituality and consciousness studies." He added that the conference will be held jointly with the Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship of Raleigh, N.C., the last remaining local group of the older SFFI, of which the Academy was the academic arm.

Tentatively, the executive committee is looking at a date during September or October for the conference – after school starts but before everyone gets too involved with the school year.

Beicher is now working on a draft to put before the way-forward committee for upgrading and expanding ASCSI. "I think my plans will be both exciting and interesting to everyone," he said, "and I hope to be able to report on them in the April issue of *The Searchlight*."

The board also adjusted membership rates, with \$40 set as the regular membership fee and \$25 for seniors (65 and over) and students (25 and under). An additional \$10 is required for Canadian residents and \$20 for other foreign destinations, to cover the increased cost of mailing.